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CANDID REFLECTIONS

ON

THE DIFFERENT MANNER

IN WHICH

THE LEARNED AND PIOUS

HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR CONCEPTIONS

CONCERNING

The DOCTRINE of the

T R I N I T Y;

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

By BENJAMIN FAWCETT, M. A.

Many good men were engaged on both sides of the controversy; so it was in the fourth century, and so it hath been ever since.

DR. JORTIN.

Si ulla pars est theologiæ, in qua facile est aut errare aut accusari, est illa de trinitate.

GROTIUS.

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CANDID REFLECTIONS, &c.

DEAR SIR,

W HATEVER may have led your thoughts to some enquiries, to you indeed of an unusual nature, and in which you are desirous to obtain farther satisfaction, you may be confident of having all the assistance in my power, and therefore will excuse this letter, if it should rather exceed in length.

I will not so much endeavour to state and determine what is *scriptural* in the doctrine of the trinity, with respect to sentiment or language, as what is merely *human*. While the doctrine itself is allowed by all to be peculiar to revelation, and in its own nature very difficult and mysterious, many unscriptural niceties and distinctions have been made use of by the pious and learned in expressing their conceptions of it. What those various and contradictory modes of expression are, and what their tendency hath been, are things well-known to persons of much reading; and it is a circumstance on many accounts very desirable, that others should not be wholly unacquainted with them; especially as such

knowledge may lead to moderation and candour, and thereby more effectually promote the cause of truth and piety. Indeed, on such a subject, the more clearly we distinguish what is of God, and what of man, the more salutary will our knowledge be. In order to this, I beg leave, Sir, to present to your view the sentiments and expressions of the principal ancient and modern writers, as they are, in a great measure, collected together in Dr. *Doddridge's Theological Lectures*, 4to. pages 379—404. There the leading design of *this letter* is stated with peculiar advantage. And though that book is more immediately calculated for the use of students in divinity, yet its numerous subjects of enquiry are rendered so intelligible, even by its mathematical form of compilation, that I earnestly recommend the whole of it to your attentive perusal. Nor is this the mere result of my esteem for the method in which my juvenile studies were conducted, or for the name of *Doddridge*, though it is a name that will be ever dear to me, as long as gratitude can influence, or the powers of recollection shall remain.

The first notice is due, on every account, to the most early christian writers, particularly those called *apostolic fathers*, and more especially *Clement*, who is so honourably mentioned by St. *Paul*. [*Phil.* iv. 3.] They appear never to have used any controversial term or phrase upon this subject; no, not so much as the word *trinity* itself, which, with many others, was the sole invention of their successors. Their minds were little disposed to such a controversy, as long as divine providence employed them in the infinitely more important cares of planting and watering

tering infant-churches, and of preparing themselves and their converts for the most tremendous storms of persecution and oppression. Such was their artless simplicity, that not a few of their expressions concerning this doctrine would have been condemned as *heretical*, if they had lived till worldly prosperity too apparently cherished in their successors a disposition to endless and unprofitable strife about words. It was their excellence and happiness to be destitute of those refinements and inventions of after-ages, which, however adorned with scholastic and pompous modes of expression, are in reality nothing more than unmeaning sounds and solemn trifling, but have been productive of the most pernicious consequences. It was a glorious simplicity, either to satisfy themselves with the very words with which the Holy Spirit hath clothed divine truth, or to allow one another the liberty of interpreting scripture in their own words. ^a

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^a An english translation of those writers may be seen in Archbishop Wake's *Apostolic Fathers*. — A new translation of the *Letter of Clement* was lately published in Scotland. — "I cannot but take occasion here, to exhort those who own and defend this doctrine, to leave off the too common practice of interweaving their own notions with it, and to return again to the mere scriptural account, resting satisfied in the simplicity thereof. By this way we shall be able more easily and satisfactorily to defend this point, than ever we are like to do any other way. For, I think, we ought to remember, that God is no further responsible for his own truths, than as he hath revealed them in the bible, and clothed them there in his own words and expressions. So that when we exceed these terms and boundaries, and borrow notions and words, either from heathen philosophers, or the cob-web speculations of the school-men, we should do well to consider, whether we be not defending an unscriptural

Though this deviation from the excellent spirit and temper of the *apostolic fathers*, and from the simplicity of their writings, was not so apparent during the second century, yet soon after it became very distinguishing. It was most of all exemplified in the writers a little before and after the time of the first general council, held at *Nice*, a city of *Bithynia*, in the year of our Lord 325, at which were present 318 bishops. They generally spoke of the Son of God, as having had a glorious nature pre-existent to his incarnation. They represented him, as derived from the Father, and nevertheless so partaking of the Father's nature as to be called *God of God*, *light of light*, and they commonly illustrate this by the simile of one taper being kindled by another, and of rays proceeding from the sun. This they explained by a greek word [*ομοουσιον*], declaring their view of Jesus Christ, as of the *same* substance with the Father. And they reckoned it *heretical* to say, that Christ was [*ομοιουσιον*] of *like* substance with, or only a resemblance of the Father.^b They also condemn-
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*“ scriptural trinity. And it is but too plain, what hurt
“ men have done this way, from the various, yea and op-
“ posite schemes they have given of this doctrine, by
“ deserting or going beyond the plain scriptural account.”*

Fleming's Christology, Vol. i. page 190, 191.

^b *“ By the word ομοουσιος, they meant, not of the
“ same numerical, or individual substance or subsistence,
“ but of the same generical substance or subsistence. As
“ among men, a son is ομοουσιος with his father; that is,
“ of the same human nature, so, in their opinion, the Son
“ of God is ομοουσιος with the Father; that is, of the same
“ divine nature. But by the word ομοιουσιος, they meant,
“ that Christ was of like substance, or like to his Father
“ in all things.”*

Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hist. Vol. ii. page 207, 212.

ed as *heretical* those, who, either on the one hand, maintained there was but one nature; or, on the other, that there were two persons in Christ. Under the same *heretical* censure they included those, who asserted the Son to have been produced by creation, or to be in the number of creatures. They ran into several other subtleties of expression, by which they seemed to study, rather to conceal, than to explain their sentiments. And amidst the obscurity of their manner of treating the subject, they grew so warm, as to anathematize, oppose, and even murder each other, on account of some or other of their unscriptural phrases. It is not therefore to be wondered at, that such a conduct should bring, as it did, a lasting reproach upon their common christianity, both among *Jews* and *Pagans*.^c

The several partizans in so unhappy a contest may be ranked under the following leaders; with whom it will be no impropriety to connect a list of *English* divines, who are of the greatest

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^c *Socrates*, the historian, preserves an epistle of *Constantine* to *Alexander*, the patriarch of *Alexandria*, and his presbyter *Arius*, in which the good emperor tells them, "The quarrel between you hath no reference to any of our edicts, nor to any new appointment in the worship of God. As you appear to be of one and the same sentiment, there is not the least shadow of a plea for interrupting communion with each other. What, therefore, can be more unreasonable, indecent, or impious, than your contending with such obstinacy and acrimony of temper, about a matter of the most trifling nature" [their different way of expressing themselves concerning the divinity of Christ,] "at the same time that such multitudes of the people of God are under your direction and determination in their most important concerns?"

eminence for their writings on this subject, and by which the affinity between the sentiments and expressions of *ancients* and *moderns* may more easily be traced.

Photinus, Bishop of *Sirmium* in the fourth century, like some others before him, seems to have asserted, that Christ was a mere man, and had no existence before his incarnation.

Nestorius, Bishop of *Constantinople* in the fifth century, held Christ to have two persons, as well as two natures.

Eutychus, Abbot at *Constantinople* in the fifth century, asserted but one nature, as well as one person, in Christ, and taught that the human nature was absorbed in the divine.

Macedonius, Bishop of *Constantinople* in the fourth century, denied the Holy Spirit to have any proper divine substance, and represented him only as a created power, which was diffused over all other creatures.

Sabellius, an *African* Bishop in the third century, taught, that the Father, Son, and Spirit were only the names and offices of the same person, who was in heaven called the Father, on earth the Son, and, as exerting his power on the creation, the Holy Spirit.

Arius, a Presbyter of *Alexandria* in the fourth century, held Christ to be only the first and most glorious creature of God, denying he had any thing that could properly be called a divine nature, any otherwise than as any thing very excellent may, by a figure, be called divine; or as his delegated dominion over the system of nature might entitle him to the name of God. He seems also to have thought, that
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the Spirit was another distinct inferior Being, created by the Son, but he did not employ himself much in this part of the controversy. His sentiments most largely prevailed, and in some places and times seem to have almost entirely swallowed up those of *Athanasius*.^d

Apollinaris, Bishop of *Laodicea* in the fourth century, "thought, that Christ being one, it " was impossible that two persons could be so " united in him, as to make one person; and " from thence he concluded, that in Christ, " the Logos, or the divine word, supplied the " place of the human soul."^e

Athanasius, Patriarch of *Alexandria* in the fourth century, like most of the fathers after the council of *Nice*, asserted three proper distinct persons, entirely equal to, and independent upon

^d *Mosheim* says, " that *Arius* was invited to *Constantinople* by the emperor *Constantine*, in order to greater preferment, and died there in a very dismal manner, in the year 336."—The translator of *Mosheim* adds in a note the following words. " After having examined this matter with the utmost care, it appears to me extremely probable, that this unhappy man was a victim to the resentment of his enemies, and was destroyed by poison, or some other violent method. A blind and fanatical zeal for certain systems of faith hath, in all ages, produced such horrible acts of cruelty and injustice."

Mosheim's Eccles. Hist. Vol. i. page 340, 8vo.

^e " *Apollinaris* was a man much esteemed for learning and piety."

Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hist. Vol. ii. page 202.

" *Apollinaris* was a man of distinguished merit, and one whose learned labours had rendered to religion the most important services. He defended strenuously the divinity of Christ against the *Arians*."

Mosheim's Eccles. Hist. Vol. i. page 344, 8vo.

upon each other, yet making up one and the same being.¹

Dr. *Waterland*, Dr. *Abram Taylor*, and many other modern *Athanasians*, carried their notion of the distinct personality and supreme divinity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, to a very great height, and seemed to have imagined, that they sufficiently supported the unity of the Godhead by asserting, that the Father, Son, and Spirit had each of them the same divine nature, as three or more men have each of them the same human nature. They allowed many things to be inexplicable in their scheme, which they charged to the weakness of our understandings, and not to the doctrine itself.

Bishop *Pearson*, Bishop *Bull*, and Dr. *Owen* agree in opinion, that though God the Father is the fountain of deity, the whole divine nature is communicated from the Father to the Son, and from both to the Spirit; yet so as that the Father and the Son are not separate, nor separable, from the divinity, but do still exist in it, and are most intimately united to it.

Mr. *Howe* seems to suppose, that there are three distinct, eternal Spirits, or distinct, intelligent

¹ " *Athanasius* was condemned by a council held at Tyre, for having obtained the see of *Alexandria* by unjustifiable methods, and for other and worse misdemeanors, if *Philostorgius* may be credited. This historian, though a favourer of the *Arian* cause, yet freely censures *Arius*, where he thought him reprehensible, and therefore might be a fair relator of other points."

Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hist. Vol. ii. page 197.

" We give up St. *Athanasius*. He was, we think, no saint, but an enormous sinner."

Robinson's Plea for the Divinity of Christ,

gent hypostases; each having his own distinct, singular, intelligent nature, united in such an inexplicable manner, as that (upon account of their perfect harmony, consent, and affection, to which he adds their mutual self-consciousness) they may be called the one God, as properly as the different corporeal, sensitive, and intelligent natures may be called one man.

Dr. *Clarke's* scheme is, that there is one supreme Being, who is the Father, and two subordinate, derived, and dependent Beings. But he waves calling Christ a creature, as *Arius* did, and principally on that foundation disclaims the charge of *Arianism*.

Mr. *Baxter* seems to have thought the three divine persons to be one and the same God, Understanding, Willing, and Beloved by himself; or Wisdom, Power, and Love; which he thinks illustrated by the three essential formalities (as he calls them) in the soul of man; viz. vital, active Power, Intellect, and Will; and in the Sun, Motion, Light and Heat.

Archbishop *Tillotson*, Dr. *Wallis*, and many others, thought the distinction between the three persons was only *Modal*, coinciding with the leading sentiment of *Sabellius*.

Dr. *Thomas Burnet* maintained one self-existent and independent, and two dependent Beings; but asserted, that the two latter are so united to and inhabited by the former, that, by virtue of such union, divine perfections may be ascribed, and divine worship paid to them.

Dr. *Watts* maintained one supreme God dwelling in the human nature of Christ, which he supposes to have existed the first of all creatures.

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He speaks of the Logos, or divine Word, as the Wisdom of God, and the Holy Spirit as the divine power, or the influence and effect of it; which he says, is a scriptural person, that is, spoken of figuratively in scripture under personal characters.

Dr. *Doddridge* laid down and defended the six following propositions.—That the glorious person, who appeared in the world by the name of Jesus Christ, did not begin to exist, when he was conceived in the womb of his virgin mother, but had a being, not only before that period, but before the creation of the world.—That Christ was the person, in and by whom God appeared to men under the Old Testament, by the name of Jehovah.—That the names, titles, attributes; works and honours, which are frequently appropriated to God, are, or seem to be, ascribed to Christ in the scriptures.—That God is so united to the derived nature of Christ, and doth so dwell in it, that by virtue of such union Christ may be properly called God, and such regards are due to him, as are not due to any created nature, or mere creature, be it in itself ever so excellent.—That divine names, titles, attributes, works, or worship are in such a manner ascribed in scripture to the Holy Spirit, as we cannot imagine would be used in speaking of a mere creature, and consequently he must be possessed of a nature properly divine.—Also that the scripture represents the Divine Being as appearing in, and manifesting himself by, the distinct persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each of which hath his peculiar province in accomplishing the work of our redemption and

and salvation, and to each of which we owe unlimited veneration, love and obedience. *

All

* The Dr. proves the *first* of these *six* propositions, by—*John's* saying the Logos *was in the beginning with God*, and afterward *was made flesh*;—our Lord's often asserting his *coming down from heaven*;—*Paul's* declaring Christ *emptied himself* of some former glory;—the Lord's appearing to *Isaiah*, and the *angel of God's* presence to *Abraham, Jacob, Moses, &c.*—and the work of creation being so expressly ascribed to Christ.

The *second* he proves, by referring to—the frequent visible appearance of *Jehovah* the God of *Israel*;—the invisibility of the Father;—*Jehovah's* being expressly called, when visibly appearing to men, *the angel of the Lord*, the *captain of the Lord's host*, the *angel in whom the name of God was*;—there being no hint of a plurality of persons successively employed as the medium of those divine manifestations;—one person being referred to as speaking, when numbers are said to be present;—this one person having been the medium of divine manifestations under the old testament, the *new* gives no intimation of his dismissal from that office;—but declares Christ to be the Logos of the Father, by whom he made the world, and governs the kingdom of providence;—various things spoken by or addressed to *Jehovah* in the old testament, are in the *new* said to be spoken of, done by, or addressed to Christ;—several things, by supposing this reference, become plain and easy;—this was the sense of the primitive Fathers;—also the *Chaldee Paraphrase*, and other ancient *Jews* spoke the same language.

The *third* he explains, by observing, how Christ—is called *Jehovah* and God;—is entitled *God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Lord of hosts, king of kings, lord of lords, the first and the last*;—is said to be omniscient, omnipresent, almighty, eternal, unchangeable;—did create and supports all things;—and by divine appointment hath religious worship given to him.

The *fourth* is argued from—such divine names, titles, attributes, and works being ascribed to Christ, and his demanding or encouraging such worship, as are elsewhere appropriated to God;—his being distinct from God, yet co-ordinate with him, would infer a plurality of Gods;—the

All the explications of this doctrine, under the ancient and modern names now mentioned, have in this one respect an equality, that they are all of them the sentiments of mere fallible men. It is to be presumed, that they endeavoured to put such a sense upon scripture, as appeared to each of them the most genuine; and in doing which they undoubtedly acted in a perfect conformity to the just and invaluable right of private judgment. But while each of them professed to agree with scripture, it seems to be a very desirable thing, to have some plain and easy rule, by which any man of common understanding, though he may not have enjoyed a liberal or learned education, may so compare their different expressions and conceptions with each

—the wonderful union there must be of God with the Man Christ, to lay a foundation for such ascriptions and regards;—and the scripture expressly speaking of such union, and of God as *dwelling in Christ*.

The *fifth* is explained, by observing, how the Holy Spirit—seems often to be called *Jehovah* in the old testament, and God in the *new*;—divine perfections are certainly ascribed to him;—divine works as evidently,—and in several texts divine worship is given to him.

The *last* of these propositions is proved by scripture representations of—God as *Father*, the Father of Christ, and through him the Father of all his people;—the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a divine person, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt, by whom the Father manifested himself to us, and who with the Father is God over all;—the Holy Spirit, as a divine person, possessor of those perfections which are to be found in God alone;—Father, Son, and Spirit often mentioned together, as distinct personal characters;—our redemption as contrived by the Father, purchased by the Son, and applied by the Spirit, by whose assistance, in the name of Christ, we are to make our approaches to the Father;—and correspondent regards to each are accordingly required from us.

each other, as to be able to estimate the degree in which they differ from one another. Perhaps there can be no rule so subservient to this purpose, as to ascertain the meaning of the word *Person*, because that word is on all sides, either expressed, or referred to, but seems to be made use of by the above writers in very different senses. The several following definitions have been given of the word, as applied to the doctrine of the trinity.

Personality, says *Marckius*, is a positive mode of Being, ultimately terminating and filling a substantial nature, and giving it incommunicability.

Personality, according to *Mr. Sloss*, expresses that perfection of the divine nature, whereby it subsists three different ways, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each of which, possessing the divine essence after his peculiar manner, thereby becomes a distinct person.

Personality, as *Dr. Waterland* defines it, is a single person, or an intelligent agent, having the distinct characters, I, Thou, He, and not divided or distinguished into more intelligent agents capable of the same characters.

The word *Person*, according to *Dr. Daniel Scott*, and the generality of writers, whether divines or others, signifies, in its *philosophical* sense, one single, intelligent, voluntary agent, or conscious being.—And, in its *political* sense, it may express the different relations supported by the same philosophical person; as for instance, the same man may be father, husband, son, &c. or the same prince may be King of Great-Britain, Duke of Brunswick, and Treasurer of the Empire.

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It is observed by Dr. *Watts*, That “ though
 “ the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are generally
 “ called *three distinct persons* by our divines, yet
 “ there are no writers, either abroad, or at home,
 “ that ever pretended this to be the express lan-
 “ guage of scripture. And there are very few, if
 “ any, of our most orthodox writers, [perhaps the
 “ Doctor should have excepted real and con-
 “ sistent *Athanasians*] who ever supposed the word
 “ *person* was to be taken here in the full, com-
 “ mon and literal sense of it, for a *distinct conscious*
 “ *being*; but only in a *qualified and restrained*
 “ sense, or a sense that is analogous or a-kin
 “ to the common meaning of it among men.
 “ For *three distinct Persons*, in the common and
 “ literal sense of it, would be three distinct Spi-
 “ rits, which very few trinitarians allow.” ^a

Now if we take the word *Person* according to the meaning of either of the *two first* definitions, we shall find it so obscure, and in a great measure so unintelligible, as rather to embarrass, than afford us any assistance. On the other hand, if we take it in its *philosophical and political* senses, we may with great advantage apply it to the present purpose, as will appear by the following specimens.

If we conceive of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with those who are real and consistent *Athanasians*, as three *philosophical persons*, we do in effect allow a plurality of Gods.

If we consider the sacred three, with the *Sabellians*, or the *Modalists*, (who also are usually ranked, and chuse to rank themselves, though very improperly, and with little consistence, under

^a *Watts's Serm.* Vol. ii. page 452, 8vo.

der the name of *Athanasians*) as only the names and offices of the same philosophical person, we thereby sink the word person to its political sense. By this means we shall expose ourselves to one alarming consequence, That provided man had never fallen into sin, there never might have been such a person and character as Jesus Christ the Son of God. Not only Archbishop *Tillotson*, Dr. *Wallis*, and many other great and good men, but even Mr. *Baxter*, seem to come under the same denomination.

If, with both the *Modalists*, and the real *Athanasians*, we conceive of Christ, as having received his soul, as well as body, in the womb of his virgin mother, we should thereby entertain exactly the same idea of him, except what relates to supreme godhead, as was done by *Photinus*, and other ancient writers, and hath since been done by *Socinus*, and his numerous followers. In this respect there appears to be a remarkable affinity between the sentiments of the *Athanasians* and the *Socinians*.

If, with Dr. *Thomas Burnet*, we conceive of the Father as dwelling in the Son and Spirit; or, with Dr. *Watts* and Dr. *Doddridge*, that the Father dwelleth in, and is united to the human nature of Christ; in each of these cases the word *Person* must at least be considered in its political sense, but cannot amount to so much as a philosophical personality. And whether there is any medium between a philosophical and political person, (which we cannot certainly say there is not) we must confess is to us unsearchable. Or should we conceive of the union of the divine and human natures in one person, as we do of the soul and body in one man, we

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should thereby propose a case that is not parallel; since the divine and human natures are two distinct conscious beings, or two philosophical persons. Or to imagine, that God and the creature should have the same consciousness, must certainly exceed our comprehension. From these premises it must follow, that the term *Person*, applied to the union of the divine and human nature of Christ, is rather to be taken in a political sense, to express the concurrent operation of the deity with his human nature, in order to constitute a perfect mediator.

Were we to assert, as Dr. *Clarke* did, that the Logos, or the divine Word, is something between a created and a self-existent nature, we should involve ourselves in the endless labyrinth of an unconceivable distinction. Nor would our perplexity be diminished, were we to conceive, with Bishop *Pearson*, Bishop *Bull*, and Dr. *Owen*, that the Father communicates his whole divine nature to the Son, and both Father and Son to the Spirit, according to the idea of derivation in which the *Nicene* creed so remarkably differs from the *Athanasian*; or, with Mr. *Howe*, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct, eternal Spirits, so united in perfect harmony, consent, and affection, as to have a mutual self-consciousness.

Were we to hope for uniformity in explaining a distinction in the Deity, among the subscribers to the *Common Prayer*, and the most respectable divines of the *Church of England*, we shall no where find ourselves more disappointed. This is manifest in the widely different sentiments and expressions of Bishop *Bull*, Bishop *Pearson*, Archbishop *Tillotson*, Dr. *Wallis*, Dr. *Thomas Burnet*,

Burnet, and *Dr. Clarke*; who are all of them as little agreed among themselves, as they are with the *Athanasian* creed.

Were we, once more, to suppose ourselves to agree in sentiment with *Apollinaris*, *Dr. Watts*, and *Dr. Doddridge*, we may then, perhaps, speak with as much simplicity and precision, as the nature of the subject will admit, and as scripture itself seems to suggest. In this view we may say, with *Mr. Orton*, "That the Lord
" Jesus Christ, by a generation which none can
" declare, is the Son of God, his only begot-
" ten Son, and therefore superior to all crea-
" tures both in earth and heaven; and that he
" is, by an union which can neither be explain-
" ed, nor conceived, one with the Father, the
" brightness of his Father's glory, and the
" express image of his person. We have no
" words to denote greater ideas than these, nor
" can the mind of man raise itself to nobler
" conceptions."¹

Every serious mind, that attentively examines, and re-examines, what hath now been represented, must acknowledge, that there are difficulties attending every scheme, which hath ever been proposed, for the explanation of this doctrine. Nor is it a thing to be wondered at, that we are so much confounded, when we enquire into the nature of superior beings, considering how little we know of our own nature and manner of existence. That the difficulties of this subject have not only puzzled the most penetrating minds, but obliged them, after all their deepest researches, to plead for moderation and candour,

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¹ *Orton's Sermons on Christian Zeal*, page 50.

will fully appear from the following extracts from their writings, which discover a temper and spirit truly worthy the attention and imitation of every impartial enquirer after truth, and especially every disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus.

Erasmus Roterodamus, at the early dawn of the reformation, and while he was surrounded with ignorance and bigotry in their most pernicious forms, wisely observes [on 1 *Tim.* i. 6.]

“ We are contending without end, what it is
 “ that distinguisheth the Father from the Son,
 “ and both from the Holy Spirit; whether it
 “ be a thing, or a relation; and how it can be,
 “ that they can be said to be three, of which
 “ one is not the other, when they are but one
 “ in essence. How much more to the purpose
 “ would it be for us, to take all possible care
 “ piously and holily to worship and adore this
 “ trinity, whose majesty we are unable to pry
 “ into; and to express their ineffable concord
 “ by our concord among ourselves, so that we
 “ may in time come to be in partnership with
 “ them.”

Dr. *Jeremiah Taylor*, who lived in a more enlightened day, but not less disposed to controversial rage, and particularly on this subject, with his usual largeness of thought and spirituality of temper, makes this solemn declaration [on *John* vii. 17.] “ He that goeth about to
 “ speak of the mystery of the trinity, and doeth
 “ it by words and names of man’s invention,
 “ talking of essences and existences, hypostases
 “ and personalities, priorities in co-equalities,
 “ &c. and unity in pluralities, may amuse him-
 “ self, and build a tabernacle in his head, and
 “ talk

“ talk something he knows not what. But the
 “ good man, who feels the power of the Father,
 “ and to whom the Son is become wisdom and
 “ righteousness, sanctification and redemption;
 “ in whose heart the love of the Spirit of God
 “ is shed abroad, this man, though he under-
 “ stand nothing of what is unintelligible, yet
 “ he alone truly understandeth the doctrine of
 “ the trinity.”

Dr. *Edmund Calamy*, at the very time when the nation was fullest of this controversy, and when he himself was preaching and writing on the *Athanasian* side of the question, yet expresses himself in this cautious manner, “ Let us be
 “ thankful for what knowledge we have, and
 “ make the best use of it we can. And in the
 “ mean time humbly own our ignorance and
 “ darkness, as to the way and manner of what
 “ God hath been pleased to reveal to us with
 “ reference to the substance of this doctrine.
 “ And whatever we are ignorant of, or in the
 “ dark about, let us conclude (as we have
 “ good reason) that if we have but the grace
 “ of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of
 “ God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit
 “ with us, we have not only as much know-
 “ ledge of the blessed trinity, as is necessary to
 “ our own scriptural orthodoxy in that doctrine,
 “ but as much knowledge of it as is necessary
 “ to secure our happiness, peace, and comfort,
 “ both in this life, and in the next. And if
 “ this will not satisfy us, and at the same time
 “ make us thankful, I think we are both un-
 “ reasonable and inexcusable.”^k

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Mr.

^k *Calamy's Serm. on the Trinity*, page 387, 388.

Mr. *Benjamin Bennet*, author of the *Christian Oratory*, so well known for his judicious and pacific, as well as for his pious and devotional temper, tells us, what indeed is of the highest importance; "If you will receive it, I think it a very useful truth, (which, had it been attended to, would have prevented many controversies, that have disturbed the christian church) viz That our chief concern with the Son of God is as Mediator. We are neither concerned to know precisely, what he was before he was incarnate, how employed in the world above, nor what he will be, and how employed, after his mediation is finished. Our present business is with the Mediator, whom God hath exalted, to whom every knee must bow, and shall bow at last, till the end cometh, and he hath delivered up the kingdom to the Father."^{1 m}

Dr,

¹ "Worship, in general, is nothing else but inward respect to a superior Being, in proportion to its known excellencies, rank, state, power, &c. expressed by proper external signs. If this be done out of obedience to a divine command, God is directly honoured and worshipped therein. By such worship the natural obligation of the *first command* is not destroyed. We are bound to worship Christ as Mediator; as for instance, by saving faith in him,—baptism into his name,—remembrance of him in his supper, and—prayer through him. This homage paid the Mediator is even to his humanity, as that is necessary to his Mediatorship. All in Christ, that bears the office of Mediator, must be worshipped when he is. His being God, may be a motive, that is, a foundation, for our firmer trust in him; but the formal reason for our trusting in him as Mediator, must be, that he is Mediator, and constituted such by God." *A sober and charitable disquisition concerning*

Dr. *Watts* is the last I will mention, however easy it might be to add many more, who concurred with him in the same liberal and pious reflections. "I am well persuaded in my own mind," says he, that neither the *Arian*, nor *Socinian* writers, neither the *Sabellian*, nor the *Tritheistic* explainers, nor any of their followers have hit upon the true solution of the difficulty. In this enlightened age of search and enquiry, men will not be satisfied to hear

B 4

" us

cerning the importance of the *Trinity*, by Mr. *Simon Browne*, (lately re-printed) author of a *Hymn Book*; and of an excellent *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*—"That creed," says Mr. *Robinson*, in his *Plea for the Divinity of Christ*, "which is called *Athanasius's*, we neither understand, nor can we conceive how the repetition of it can be thought an act of divine worship acceptable to God; and its damnable clauses we utterly abhor. We do not propose distinct addresses in prayer to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, as the *established litany* does. God is one undivided essence, and to him, the one God, is our worship addressed, through the Mediator Jesus Christ."—Thus far Mr. *Robinson* agrees with Mr. *Bennet* concerning the Mediator, and with Mr. *Browne* concerning mediatorial worship; but he much differs from them, when he says, "Do christians worship Jesus Christ? We do not worship the Man Jesus, but we do worship the God, who dwells in the man; for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."—With an immediate reference to the language of prayer, and well-consistent with his great reforming work, *Luther* said, "It is better to call Almighty God, God, than *Trinity*."—But *Calvin* more explicitly declared, "I like not this prayer, O holy, blessed, and glorious *Trinity*, have mercy on us. It savours of barbarity. The word *trinity* is barbarous, insipid, prophane; a human invention, grounded on no testimony of God's word; the popish God, or idol, altogether unknown to the prophets and apostles."

“ us make use of inexplicable and mysterious
 “ terms, and tell them, that the sense of them
 “ is never to be known. They will not think,
 “ that doctrine can be of so much importance
 “ to us, which is wrapt up in perpetual dark-
 “ ness, and can never be understood. Our final
 “ salvation doth not depend on our exact and
 “ skilful knowledge of the true modus of ex-
 “ plaining this heavenly doctrine. Great and
 “ pious men in several ages have got safe to
 “ heaven with very different schemes and hypo-
 “ theses. It is abundantly sufficient for salva-
 “ tion, if we believe the various offices, which
 “ are assigned to the Father, Son, and Spirit
 “ in the dispensation of the gospel, and that
 “ each of them hath a divine all-sufficiency to
 “ sustain their offices, and to receive the ho-
 “ nours due to them.—Since I have searched
 “ more studiously into this mystery of late, I
 “ have learned more of my own ignorance. So
 “ that when I speak of these *unsearchables*, I
 “ abate much of my younger assurance, nor do
 “ my later thoughts venture so far into the
 “ particular modes of explaining this sacred dis-
 “ tinction in the Godhead. There appears to
 “ me good reason to doubt, whether there can
 “ be three distinct and different wills in the one
 “ God, the one infinite Spirit. I was afraid to
 “ assert it heretofore, and I am more afraid to
 “ assert it now. Reason and scripture join to
 “ teach me, that there can be but one God,
 “ and that this God is a Spirit. What distinc-
 “ tion may be in this one Spirit, I know not.
 “ Yet I am fully established in the belief of the
 “ *Deity of the blessed Three*, though I know not
 “ the manner of explication.—Let us wonder

“ at

“ at the blessedness of the Man Christ Jesus in
 “ his approach to God. His very union to
 “ God is habitual blessedness. He is constitu-
 “ ted near to God by an unspeakable union.
 “ What joys, what unknown delights, above
 “ our language, and above our thoughts, pos-
 “ sels the holy soul of the Man Jesus ! For he
 “ is the nearest creature to the blessed God ;
 “ for he is one with Godhead. The son of
 “ *David*, according to the flesh, is joined in a
 “ perpetual union to the eternal God, and thus
 “ *he is over all God blessed for evermore.*”^a

It would have been unspeakably happy for
 christian churches, both ancient and modern, if
 the differences relating to this doctrine, among
 the learned and pious, had been viewed and ad-
 justed according to the healing sentiments of the
five authors last mentioned. This would have
 appeased the rage of persecution among fellow-
 christians, and have made those, whose apprehensions were most different, to agree to differ.
 This would have filled their minds with brotherly love towards each other, instead of wrath and anger, animosity and contention, with every odious form of mutual resentment, censure and reproach. Certainly this ought to have been the case, considering, not only how all this *strange fire* was kindled by unjustly refusing every one's right to interpret scripture for himself, but that many of those, whose opinions were most different from each other, were persons of the most diligent application to study,

the

^a *Watts's Preface to Scott's Sermon on John xx. 28.*

—— *Serm. Vol. i. page 250, 260, 8vo.*

the greatest reading and learning, and of the most excellent characters. We may therefore assure ourselves, that many things asserted on one side and the other, relating to this doctrine, are by no means so *fundamental* in religion, as many have unwarily imagined. Let us but suppose any man to come to scripture with impartial enquiry, and fervent prayer for divine assistance, and then, whatever may be the result concerning his scheme of sentiment on this head, it cannot any way affect his eternal state. The gospel hath sufficiently ascertained the terms of salvation for every man, by requiring, not a speculative, but a practical faith, even such *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*, as is productive of holy and persevering obedience. Were we to imagine this divine appointment may be so modified, as to make any man's everlasting welfare depend on his attachment to any set of notions, would it not be applying the same absurdity to doctrines, and particularly to this of the trinity, as the *Papists* so commonly do to that of transubstantiation? It reminds me of my debating that subject with a *Roman Catholic* at *Brussels*, in the year 1740, when I proposed to him this very plain question, Which of these two men he would look upon to be in a state of salvation; one, who disbelieved the doctrine of transubstantiation, but was in all respects eminently virtuous and devout; or another, who believed that doctrine, and lived in the allowed commission of every species of criminality? Alas! I was soon convinced, that it was in vain to reason any longer with a person, who declared to me in the most solemn manner, "That the
" former

“ former would undoubtedly be damned, and
 “ the latter as undoubtedly be saved.”

No one could exceed the humble and pious Dr. *Watts*, either in laborious and candid enquiries after truth, or in fervent prayers that his attempts might be successful. We have a very remarkable proof of this, in a posthumous publication, entitled, *A solemn address to the great and ever-blessed God on a review of what he had written in the trinitarian controversy.**

Part of that address is as follows. “ Hadst
 “ thou informed me, gracious Father, in any
 “ place of thy word, that this divine doctrine
 “ is not to be understood by men, and yet they
 “ were required to believe it, I would have
 “ subdued all my curiosity to faith, and submit-
 “ ted my wandering and doubtful imaginations,
 “ as far as it was possible, to the holy and wise
 “ determinations of thy word.—Thou art wit-
 “ ness, O my God, with what diligence, with
 “ what constancy and care, I have read and
 “ searched thy holy word; how early and late,
 “ by night and by day, I have been making
 “ these enquiries: how fervently I have been
 “ seeking thee, on my bended knees, and di-
 “ rected my humble addresses to thee, to en-
 “ lighten my darkness, and to shew me the
 “ meaning of thy word, that I may learn what
 “ I must believe, and what I must practise,
 “ with regard to this doctrine, in order to please
 “ thee, and obtain eternal life.—Forbid it, O
 “ my God, that ever I should be so unhappy
 “ as to unglorify my Father, my Saviour, or
 “ my

* *Watts's Works*, 4to. Vol. iv. page 640—643.

“ my Sanctifier, in any of my sentiments or expressions concerning them.”

If such diligent, candid and devout enquiry after truth had been more generally practised among christians, they would never have allowed themselves in forming rash conclusions concerning each others characters, merely on account of their different sentiments on this doctrine. Those, who adhere to the *Athanasian* scheme would never have ascribed the opinions of any of their opponents to want of *grace*. Nor would the latter ever have imputed the doctrine of the former to want of *sense*. Why should *moral* defects be necessarily connected with one species of speculation, or *natural* defects with another? How much better for both sides to have waved all indecent recriminations! In such a doubtful case, how happy to say with the apostle, *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind! Why dost thou judge thy brother?* Hath not God given, both to him, and to thee, a right to judge, in such matters, each for himself? Had these rational and scriptural considerations been more generally attended to, according to their obvious importance, there would have been less occasion to admire the candour of Mr. Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, in his *Plea for the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Though he appears to be one of its warmest advocates, yet he shows himself to be equally warm for the most charitable and brotherly treatment of those, who are thought most of all to differ from him. See this in his manner of proposing and answering the following questions.—“ What a strange divinity
“ of Christ you hold! why don't you explain
“ it

“ it by the *Athandian* creed, or by some ap-
 “ proved system? Because I don’t understand
 “ it well enough, and because creeds do not sa-
 “ tisfy me. Would you have me explain what
 “ I do not understand?—Why do you not per-
 “ secute, at least with the tongue, those mon-
 “ strous *Unitarians*? Because I have no warrant
 “ from Christ to do so, nor the least inclination
 “ to forge one.—This is well enough: But why
 “ do you praise them in every company? Be-
 “ cause a mistaking man may merit praise for
 “ that very industry, which hath led him into
 “ an error, and for that integrity which makes
 “ him, against his interest, support it.—But
 “ what occasion is there to keep company with
 “ them, and to maintain an intimacy with them?
 “ Because on every other article they edify me,
 “ and on this we agree to differ. In the posses-
 “ sion of this truth, I think, I have the advan-
 “ tage of them. In regard to many others, I
 “ am not worthy to speak to them; I glory in
 “ being their disciple.—In what light then do
 “ you consider a sincere man, who denies our
 “ Lord’s divinity? In the light of a mistaken
 “ brother; in every other attitude an object of
 “ esteem, and in that of denying the divinity
 “ of my Lord, an object of my tenderest com-
 “ passion.—All this argues great coldness to
 “ your Lord! I would rather be frozen into a
 “ formalist, than inflamed with the fire of hell;
 “ in the first case I should be a harmless statue,
 “ in the last a destroyer like the devil.”

In one of the preceding questions Mr. *Robinson*’s opponents are called *Unitarians*. Under that term, according to its real import, are comprehended all those, who do not explain the dis-

distinction in the Godhead by three distinct self-conscious Beings. So that every one is an *Unitarian*, who is not a *Tritheist*. But it is evident, by the animadversions contained in Mr. *Robinson's* tract, that he more immediately refers to such *Unitarians*, as are the reputed followers of *Photinus* and *Socinus*. If there is a propriety in making use of such terms, as distinguish those sentiments concerning the trinity, which deviate from what is properly called *Athanasianism*, this of *Unitarian* is much more intelligible than that of *Arian*. The latter is but one of the many different species included under the former. Yet nothing hath been more common, though nothing can be more improper, than to call all those *Arians*, who do not rank themselves with the followers of *Athanasius*. The impropriety is still more apparent, as there never was a time, perhaps, when the real followers of *Arius* were so few, as in the present day, or those of the other different species of *Unitarians* more numerous.

But whatever *fame* or *infamy*, according to vulgar estimation, may belong to names or parties, it is a most important truth, that Christ hath given us no warrant, as Mr. *Robinson* well argues, to speak evil of others, on account of their differing from us in religious sentiments, and particularly in their manner of conception and expression concerning this doctrine. For, as the learned *Grotius* observes [in the motto of the title page], "If there be any one point in
 " the whole compass of christian doctrine, in
 " which it is easy, either to be in an error, or
 " to be accused of being so, it is this of the
 " trinity." Should many serious christians be
 found

found in the rank of such accusers, we need not be surprized. Probably they have read little upon the subject, that had any tendency to discover to them its difficulties, and how much the most learned and pious in different ages and countries have differed from each other in their conceptions and expressions concerning it. Perhaps all their ideas of it are confined within the narrow limits of a particular party, and all their ways of expressing it have been dictated to them by their catechisms and accustomed forms of worship. The many disadvantages they are under for attaining to more distinct knowledge, added to their undesigning simplicity and serious piety, will go far in apologizing for them; at least these will entitle them to the tender pity of those, whom they rashly and ignorantly condemn. But it will not be so easy to excuse persons of a more liberal education, especially ministers of the gospel, if they should so far forget themselves, and the importance of their character and example, as to promote reputed orthodoxy, by what in them makes near approaches to real immorality. For is it not immoral, to murder the reputation of others by charges without proof, or by plausible insinuations of such things as have no real existence but in vulgar prejudices? Is not this *holding the truth in unrighteousness*; not as it is in *Jesus*, but as it is in the grand *accuser of the brethren*? Hath not such a temper and conduct a tendency in the most effectual manner to prejudice the minds of young people, and especially of young divines, against the very doctrine it is designed to inculcate? No doubt such intemperate zeal will plead conscience for what it does.

does. But the plea is utterly insufficient, as long as their practice is irrational and unscriptural. Thus *Calvin* pleaded conscience, when he persecuted *Servetus* to a violent death. And such a mistaken conscience our Lord describes, when he says, *Whosoever killeth you, will think he doeth God service.*^p

“ How well, says Dr. *Watts*, hath the blessed
 “ God provided for love and union amongst all
 “ his true worshippers ! He hath left them no
 “ just ground to contend and quarrel, or break
 “ themselves into little angry parties, for he
 “ hath now appointed but one religion for them
 “ all,

^p “ While protestants acknowledge, in words, that the
 “ scriptures are the rule of faith, and alone sufficient to
 “ make men wise unto salvation, and every party is well
 “ disposed to judge for themselves ; they appear extremely
 “ jealous of granting the same liberty to one another ;
 “ and, instead of the scriptures, would slip in their own
 “ explications and comments, bind their decisions upon
 “ others as an infallible standard, and oblige them to see
 “ with *their* eyes. And what is this but popery under
 “ another name ? It is the worst and most pernicious part
 “ of it.—Such have been led to believe through acci-
 “ dent ; and they can perceive no reason why others
 “ should not believe in the same manner. They depend
 “ not, therefore, upon argument but authority. If you
 “ see with their eyes, it is well ; but if you will use your
 “ own, you may be fully assured, that the severity of pe-
 “ nal laws, if the power shall be unhappily lodged in
 “ their hands, will convince you of your obstinacy. Or
 “ if they can go no further, they will show *what manner*
 “ *of spirit they are of*, by fairly giving you over to the
 “ devil, so far as their interest goes. In vain, therefore,
 “ do these patrons of religious uniformity talk of liberty,
 “ of conscience, of reason and argument. They are at
 “ bottom the enemies of conscience and private judg-
 “ ment.”

Enquiry into the powers of Ecclesiastics. page 71,
 101, 102.

“ all, one general method of access to him,
 “ He hath ordained but one Mediator, Jesus
 “ Christ, and hath appointed one Spirit, to
 “ draw their hearts near to himself. A glorious
 “ religion indeed, that unites *Jews and Gentiles*,
 “ and mankind of all nations to the great and
 “ blessed God! And what a disgrace is it to
 “ this religion, that we should not be more
 “ united to one another? *We are no more*
 “ *strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with*
 “ *the saints, and of the house-hold of God.* What
 “ a most absurd and grievous thing is it, that
 “ we who are brought into such a state of
 “ friendship by divine grace, should obey the
 “ corrupt dictates of nature, and the lusts of
 “ the flesh! That we should quarrel and fight,
 “ even in the presence of that God, to whom
 “ we have access by the blood of one Mediator,
 “ and by the influence of one Spirit! Surely
 “ this must be a Spirit of union, and peace,
 “ and love; this one Spirit which reconciles God
 “ and man, who were at a dreadful distance,
 “ this Spirit which reconciles *Jews and Gentiles*,
 “ who were mutual strangers and enemies. And
 “ how can we suppose we are governed by this
 “ uniting Spirit, this Spirit of gentleness, meek-
 “ ness and friendship, if we indulge the fer-
 “ ments of wrath and revenge in our bosom;
 “ if we resolve to carry on strife and conten-
 “ tion, with the language of railing and revil-
 “ ing, against those, who worship the same God
 “ by the same Mediator? How can we hope
 “ that this Spirit hath ever reconciled us to
 “ God, if we persist in enmity against our
 “ brethren? Should we *have all faith*, and
 “ *remove mountains*, if we *have not love*, we are
 “ not christians. The very nature and life of

“ christianity is *faith working by love*, faith
 “ leading the soul to God through the media-
 “ tion of Jesus Christ his Son, by the aid of
 “ the Holy Spirit, and producing all works of
 “ holiness by the influence of love to God and
 “ man. May this be wrought in our hearts,
 “ and practised in the whole course of our
 “ life!”^a

I know, Sir, your hospitable mansion hath often entertained such company, whose censures of others, and particularly of their reverend brethren, have occasioned not a little pain to your candid mind. In such a case, it would be perfectly consistent with the rules of hospitality and politeness, as well as afford you an unspeakable pleasure, if you could suggest any thing, that might lessen their fondness for their own manner of expressing this doctrine, and at the same time moderate their resentment against those, whose sentiments, or prudence, or tenderness to others oblige them to make use of very different modes of expression. You would thereby, not only promote the true interest of christianity, but most effectually answer, what is, indeed, the principal design of *this letter*. For with no other intention are the sentiments and expressions of ancient and modern writers here ascertained, and their difference from each other placed in such a distinguishing point of view. From these copious materials you may easily collect, while in conversation with your friends, whatever hath a more immediate tendency to lessen their confidence in the propriety of their favourite phraseology. No doubt you will find them dissatisfied with Dr. Doddridge's *propositions*, though he produces such

^a *Watts's Sermons*, Vol. II. page 481, 482, 8vo.

such abundant evidence from scripture for them, as, by consulting his book, you will see under their several solutions and demonstrations. You will as undoubtedly hear your zealous friends asserting nothing less than a deity, consisting of three proper distinct persons, independent upon and entirely equal to each other. You may therefore ask them such questions as these. "Is
 " not a *philosophical personality* your meaning
 " here? If so, is it not unreasonable, unscriptural, and absurd to conceive of supreme deity,
 " as having three distinct wills, three distinct self-consciousnesses? Or, that the same self-consciousness should be common and mutual to
 " three distinct eternal spirits? Or, that the
 " same absolute perfections of deity should be
 " communicated from one philosophical person
 " to another, and from both to a third, so as
 " each of the three to retain the whole? On
 " the other hand, if they mean a *political personality*, whether it is not as unreasonable and
 " unscriptural to reduce the Son and Spirit to
 " a mere nominal existence? On the whole,
 " whether it is not far more eligible to decline
 " the use of language, so utterly insufficient
 " for its intended purpose, so entirely the invention of fallible men, and so much the
 " engine of endless debate, and the source of
 " hatred, separation, and every evil work?
 " Whether it was not the felicity of the *apostolic fathers*, especially of the Apostles themselves,
 " to know nothing of such language? In one
 " word, whether a just value for scripture will
 " not grow, in proportion as this fondness for
 " human phrases is diminished?"

If you succeed, Sir, in this first effort, and have the pleasure to observe your company less

attached to words without proper meaning, you
 will more chearfully proceed to some farther en-
 quiries, such as these. “ Why should not un-
 “ scriptural speculations be as tolerable in others,
 “ as in ourselves? Have they not the same
 “ right to exercise the faculty of imagination
 “ and invention, as we have? Is not fallibili-
 “ ty as inseparable from our character, as from
 “ theirs? If our indefensible expressions on
 “ this subject have been consistent with our re-
 “ taining the essential truths of the gospel, and
 “ the piety of real christians, why should it not
 “ be equally so with theirs? Do they not pro-
 “ fess the same value for scripture, as the only
 “ infallible standard of faith and practice?
 “ Have they not the same right to interpret
 “ scripture for themselves? Are there not in
 “ their writings the evidences of learning and mo-
 “ desty? Are not their lives blameless exampla-
 “ ry and useful? In all these respects do they not
 “ justly claim our esteem? And when we have
 “ this esteem for them, does it not contribute to
 “ the repose of our minds; as there is nothing
 “ more subversive of self-enjoyment, than bi-
 “ gotted and unfriendly thoughts of others? —
 “ But there are other inducements to our esteem
 “ for them, that are of a nature still more in-
 “ teresting and important. Are they not per-
 “ fectly agreed with us in acknowledging *one*
 “ *God, and one Mediator between God and man,*
 “ *the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom*
 “ *for all, and through whom we all have an access*
 “ *by one spirit unto the Father?* Is not such
 “ agreement an infinitely stronger bond of union,
 “ than any mode of mere human speculation or
 “ expression? *What doth hinder us then from*
 “ cultivating friendship with them? and you,
 “ gen-

“ gentlemen, in particular, from *giving them the*
 “ *right hand of fellowship* in every ministerial
 “ function? Or rather, why does not love to
 “ Christ and his members, and zeal for the ho-
 “ nour and interest of our common christianity,
 “ oblige us to maintain christian communion
 “ with them, on every occasion, and without
 “ the least interruption? Which of us is not
 “ all attention to the apostle, when he says,
 “ *Receive them, but not to doubtful disputations.*
 “ *Let us therefore follow after the things which*
 “ *make for peace, and things wherewith one may*
 “ *edify another?* ”

While you are suggesting to your guests such
 persuasions to caution and candour, I doubt not,
 Sir, but they will admire your discernment and
 benevolence. They will feel their social hours
 pass away with pleasure and profit well mingled.
 When they depart, it will be with a full con-
 viction, that your enquiries were by no means
 intended for personal victory, but were solely
 calculated for the nobler purpose of exchanging
 the prejudices of education and rash censures of
 others, for solid wisdom and brotherly love.

Desirable as it is, that such wisdom and candour
 may have their proper influence in all our social
 interviews, it is not less so, to have the same
 salutary influence extended to public sermons
 and prayers. It cannot but be painful to every
 discerning and pious mind, to hear a minister in
 the pulpit; perhaps in all the heat and inex-
 perience of youth; and much more if his years
 are sufficient to have meliorated his temper, and
 improved his knowledge; yet expressing himself
 without the least intimation of self-diffidence,
 and with the most severe censures upon others;
 though the subject itself hath puzzled the most
 learned,

learned, sagacious and pious minds through successive ages, and they have entertained such widely different sentiments concerning it. It is painful to observe, with what solemn confidence those peculiar phrases are uttered in a worshipping assembly, which men have invented, to shew themselves *wise above what is written*, and concerning the meaning and tendency of which, if the speaker was properly interrogated, he would soon find himself involved in the greatest perplexities. In all probability he would be obliged to reflect upon himself with conscious shame, for not *understanding, either what he said, or whereof he affirmed*. On the contrary, he would find no expedient so effectual, in order to restore and maintain the peace of his mind, or secure his reputation and usefulness, as both in prayer and preaching to express himself, as much as possible, in such terms, as will avoid giving offence, and tend to edify true christians of all sentiments and denominations. Or rather, according to the excellent advice of *Paul to Titus, in doctrine*, as well as in prayer, *showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*. Would to God, that young ministers attended to this apostolic advice, when they are drawing up their confessions of faith, preparatory to their ordination! And that all those ministers, who assist on such occasions, as well as other persons who attend them, would be ambitious of conforming to it themselves, and take complacency in them that do! But if any be otherwise minded, doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,
and

and perverse disputings, let us either possess ourselves in silence, or *by the meekness of wisdom* endeavour to bring good out of evil.

On the whole, whatever disagreement there hath been, or may continue to be, in the manner of conception or expression concerning the *divine nature*, it is happy for us, that there is little or none concerning *divine love*. Loving God is the life of religion. Therefore our blessed Lord, who is himself the grand medium of religion, asked *Peter*, and with him every christian, and every christian minister, *Lovest thou me?* Nothing could be more easy and intelligible in itself, or more important and interesting to all his followers. But that his ministers might, at once, discern the sincerity of their own love to him, and be excited to *fulfil their ministry* for him, he added, *Feed my sheep, feed my lambs*. Thus they are directed to the best expedient for accomplishing the best work in the world; that is, by love to Christ to draw multitudes to love him. Their sincerely attempting this, and much more their succeeding in it, is of infinitely greater importance, and will be infinitely more for their honour and happiness, than disputing about the doctrine of the Trinity, or gaining over others

to

“ Let the scriptures speak for themselves. Let the doctrine of Christ and his apostles be delivered in their own words. Lay aside all human inventions and additions to the words of God, all terms that are antisciptural and barbarous, and peace and unity will soon be restored to the church. These are of infinitely greater value than controversy; that is, than the rage of parties, which subsists principally upon artificial terms, not to be found in scripture, but the jargon of school-men, from whom we received nothing more than hard names of their own invention, equally the disgrace of language, philosophy and religion.” Dr. Gregory Sharp’s Sermon. No. 16, page 285.

to what they may imagine the most rational and scriptural ideas or language concerning it. Your partiality, Sir, in my favour, will easily credit me, (and O may my witness be in heaven, and my record on high!) that in this one point are centered the unwearied labours and fervent prayers of

Your's, &c.

Kidderminster,
January 26, 1777.

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